

Witch 401

Chapter 401: Winter in the Fjords

In the sea of the Fjords lies Sleeping Island.

The skyline turned a pale yellow as the last of the highrise buildings was finally completed. Although the setting sun was not visible, one could still see a streak of golden light reflected on the sea's surface by the sunset glow that passed through the clouds. Only the harsh cold gusts of wind, which blew directly at one's face, gave away the fact that it was no longer autumn.

"And it's done." Lotus lifted up the scarf around her neck until her ears were also covered by the soft cotton. "This will be our new home once the furniture and beds are moved in."

"Fantastic!" Durat Kimshoe clapped and said. "That's a lot of houses built in half a month. And I thought Lady Tilly was exaggerating."

"Lady Tilly doesn't lie," Breeze added.

"Indeed," Durat stroked his thick double chin and said. "If that's the case, I'm reassured about resettling my citizens over here. Oh, what's this?"

The merchant who came from the Crescent Moon Bay analyzed the groove-shaped parapet that was in the house. Bending his body, he even stuck his head in the hole to take a look inside.

"This is a warming device that I learnt about in the Western Region. It's called a heated brick bed." Lotus explained. "It's connected to the kitchen, and hence when a fire is started in the kitchen, this bed will also turn warm. "Add a wooden plank on top and cover it with linen or straw, and you can use it as a bench or a bed. It'll be more comfortable than your typical furniture, especially in the current season."

"Interesting design," Durat said and glanced squarely at Lotus. "If I wanted to hire you for the long term, how many gold royals would it cost?"

"What... do you mean?" Lotus was slightly astonished.

"Follow me to work in the Crescent Moon Bay. There remain several wastelands which have yet to be developed in my territory. Your abilities will prove extremely useful." Durat rubbed his hands and said. "How many gold royals do I have to pay the 'Sleeping Spell' in order for Lady Tilly to authorize you to follow me?"

"Sorry, I've never thought of leaving..."

"Your life over there will be much better than it is here," Durat interrupted quickly. "You'll get to live in the same large compound as me, enjoy fine wine and cuisine from the Four Kingdoms every day, and have attendants accompanying you wherever you go. That's the ideal life that many people envision, and I'm giving it to you as long as you work for me. Besides, Lady Tilly has said that the requests of the 'Sleeping Spell' must be fulfilled, and I'm able to afford your recruitment fees no matter how high it is."

Lotus frowned. She was not unfamiliar with his kind of attitude. Although verbally, he said that he was hiring her, it felt to her more as though she was being bought. Just as she was about to bawl out a few sentences, Breeze gently tugged on her hand. "Even though the requests must be fulfilled, it doesn't mean that it'll be accepted. There are some things that even witches can't do. Besides, all parties have to approve before an agreement can be made."

"You mean that money alone isn't enough? I've never seen a deal like this," Durat spoke with displeasure. "Was what you said when you cast the 'Sleeping Island' mere rhetoric to make fun of us? "No one will believe or be interested in you if this goes on."

"I doubt so," someone responded from behind. "There's only one witches' guild that offers rewards, whether it be in the Fjords or the Four Kingdoms. If you don't come, there will be others."

"Who speaks?" The merchant turned his head and received a rude shock. "Y... Your Highness Thunder!"

"I came up with some of the ideas for the regulations of the 'Sleeping Spell'. Before a contract is signed, the consent of the employee has to take into consideration the possible risks associated with the tasks. They'll not be forced to venture into grave danger," Thunder said in a clear voice and laughed. "Do you have an issue with this?"

"No... this is definitely reasonable." Durat's facial expression restored to normal. "Then... I'll still have to trouble you in the future, Miss Lotus."

"Phew." Lotus watched the merchant and his entourage make their departure, and sighed in relief. "Thanks."

"No problem, I was just passing through." Thunder laughed. "Didn't you follow Lady Tilly to the Western Region?"

"Yes, but I came back early together with Honey and Breeze, because Sleeping Island needed to prepare supplies and houses for winter." She gave him a simple account of the matter. "Have you completed your expedition?"

"Hahaha, yes... it was an incredible and unimaginable trip." Thunder's eyes lit up as soon as she mentioned his expedition. "This was the first time I saw different sea levels occurring at the same time. Our ship seemed as though it was flying. We didn't 'fall' into the sea when we advanced past the cliffs that were formed by the waves! If I hadn't seen it myself, I absolutely wouldn't believe that such a strange sight could be real."

"Different... sea levels?" Lotus murmured. "How could it be? The sea water ain't rocks. Wouldn't it flow downwards?"

"Hmm, I named it the 'Sealine', and it's located to the northeast of the Shadow Islands. When we reached the top of a cliff, it would appear like a long line which we couldn't see the ends of, and the sea would seem to be divided into two distinct sections." He patted his chest excitedly. "I can't wait to venture even further next time!"

It was indeed worthy of the most prominent explorer in the Fjords that the first thing he talked about upon his return was regarding his adventures, and not regarding his daughter who was far away in the Western Region. Lotus shook her head helplessly as she watched him talk on and on.

Before darkness fell and the temperature outdoors plunged, Lotus had already climbed early into the heated brick bed. This was the most relaxing moment of her day. For more than a month, she not only constructed a new batch of houses but also renovated the creaking houses of other witches. Crowding on to the heated brick bed with everyone else and chatting about her experiences in Border Town, the questions from her companions - which were borne out of a mix of curiosity and envy - ensured that she did not get any sleep for half of the night.

The conversation topic shifted to the Bird Beak Mushrooms.

Her companions started to salivate when she mentioned how she prepared them. She would place the mushrooms in some butter and flip them a few times, then fry until both sides of the mushrooms were golden brown in color, and finally sprinkle a bit of salt on top to create a most delicious dish.

"Mmm... I feel like eating this," Shadow exclaimed. "After eating dried fish onboard for a month, my mouth is full of a salty and fishy smell."

"Great," Molly could not help interrupting Lotus. "If only I was the one whom Lady Tilly's elder brother invited."

"Hey, there are even more amazing things you haven't heard." Someone giggled. "In the showers of Border Town, the water comes straight out of the wall, and the scented soap makes your whole body smell great after showering."

"There's really something like this?" Shadow asked curiously.

"Of course, and I even brought one back." Lotus curled her lips upwards. "But it has been used up."

"Don't talk about it. At least they got to experience it. I followed Lady Tilly to the Western Region and then immediately brought these girls back here. I didn't get to enjoy anything!" Breeze bemoaned.

As she listened to the witches' gabbling discussions, Lotus suddenly had a thought.

If it was instead His Highness Roland Wimbleton who wanted to hire her long term, would she have agreed?

After contemplating for a while, she realized that she would not be able to refuse if it was indeed Roland.

What an embarrassment!

Lotus tucked herself inside her quilt and glanced left and right. Luckily, the lamp was already extinguished, or else someone might have realized what she was thinking about.

However, when would Lady Tilly finally be able to accept His Highness Roland?

It would be great if they could stay together forever. Lotus held the cloth tightly in her arms. If so, it would be good for me and the other witches, as we would all be able to live happily in Border Town.

Chapter 402: Organizational Structure

At the beginning of the second month of winter, Barov walked into Roland's office, carrying a stack of books under his arms.

As he walked up to Roland's table, a huge color painting on the table caught his attention. "Is this... a map of the entire Western Region?"

"Not just the Western Region," Roland said, laughing. "It also includes a portion of the Barbarian Land and the Misty Forest, especially this space over here." He pointed to an area in the northern part of the Impassable Mountain Range—it was the Fertile Plains that Agatha had talked about. "At present, the area that we've already discovered is equivalent to three Western Regions. If we manage to cultivate the land of this large space, we can resettle hundreds of thousands of people."

In order to eliminate the threat that came from Devil's Town, he had sent Lightning and Maggie to comb through the area and draw up a map. Now that Maggie could carry Soraya while she did the drawing, more accurate maps could be drawn. Although the disappearance of the Devil's camp was still a mystery, the good news was that there was no sign of another enemy camp within 200 kilometers of Border Town.

"In the Barbarian Land, there aren't only demonic beasts, but also... scary enemies, like you said." Barov's words came with a hint of hesitation. "Won't it be too dangerous to cultivate the land towards the northwest?"

"By that time, the First Army will most likely be equipped with the power to fight demons." Roland slowly swiveled his finger around the plains on the map. "It won't be safe anywhere if we're unable to defeat these enemies."

Ever since demon scouts were spotted in the Misty Forest, he knew that he could not conceal this information for long. In order to prevent the panic that could be brought about by a sudden revelation, he first disclosed the existence of demons to his top brass. Judging from the current situation, the reaction of the people were fairly normal. Of course, he had slightly downplayed the strength of the demons by asserting that they were of the same ilk as demonic hybrid beasts, while he did not divulge the history of the two Battles of Divine Will.

Roland knew that his kingdom could not remain on the mainland border forever if it wanted to be on par with the Four Kingdoms. Only the Barbarian Land... or should we say, the Fertile Plains, was a land area that was worthy of his governance. In fact, the area that had been explored was only a tiny fraction of the entire plains. One could imagine the vast amount of land that humans occupied during the second Battle of Divine Will.

He retracted his finger, then rolled up the map and placed it to one side. "Do you have any news to report?"

"Yes, Your Highness." Barov nodded and then spread the books that were under his arms in front of the prince. "I've drawn up a plan for the City Hall's expansion according to your demands."

"Oh? I'll have a look."

In order to cope with the rapid growth of territory after the establishment of the city, Roland utilized a futuristic classification of his government's functional departments, and thus set a new framework for

management organizations of his time. Overall, the upper sector of the government was divided into four main branches, namely the City Hall, the military, the Security Bureau and the Witch Union.

Under the expansion plan, the new City Hall would assume the role of the cabinet or State Department, and would be the core institution of the entire territory. In time, the personnel would increase to approximately 500 people. Its six departments would be finance, foreign affairs, education, agriculture, industry and law, while new departments could be added at any time according to demand. Moreover, if (or when) the Kingdom of Graycastle was reunified, all of the other cities could follow this template and set up corresponding lower sector institutions, and together they would be managed by the City Hall.

In addition to its battle staff, the military also had independent production and medical departments that served as logistical safeguards. Every military division had a commander-in-chief who was responsible for specific combat matters, but the supreme authority of the military rested with Roland himself.

The Security Bureau was a secret organization which hid in the dark. Its funds were not allocated by the City Hall, while its members were also not recorded in any dossier. Its primary functions were to monitor and ensure the security within the territory and handle issues of official corruption.

Lastly, the Witch Union... Roland had thought hard about this organization but eventually decided that it would be a separate department, instead of sorting the witches into the other departments.

This was because, for some of the witches, their abilities would increase dramatically after evolution, and then they would be able to work across multiple departments. For example, Anna and Soraya could both play important roles in industry, agriculture, military, and education.

Another reason was that there would be times when a witch would not be assigned any work, and therefore, classifying them together could effectively avoid dampening their enthusiasm. This was a point that Scroll and Wendy had brought up to him.

Roland hoped that in the future, the Witch Union would operate on its own, which included handling its membership, inspection and work allocation.

"Are you really able to hire so many literate people?" After he finished reading the City Hall Director's proposal, Roland raised his head and asked. A 500-person institution was considered enormous in this era. Plus, the requirement that every employee had to be literate would almost certainly be impossible to fulfil in other territories. Although the royal city of each kingdom might have sufficient literate people, these were in large part nobles who were too proud and arrogant to be willing to serve as apprentices.

"Add in the fresh batch of graduates and there shouldn't be a problem," Barov replied. "According to the feedback from the recruitment notices, jobs in the City Hall are the most popular."

"It seems that being a civil servant is popular everywhere..." Roland arched his lips upwards uncontrollably. "In that case, go ahead and recruit people according to this scheme. The next and final task is to formulate laws."

"Pass me the principal article that you mentioned the last time, and I'll have my apprentices complete the rest as fast as possible," the City Hall Director said in high spirits.

"It's called Basic Laws," Roland said and laughed. It appeared that enthusiastic "model workers" were not only confined to witches—this was a good sign for a new regime.

"Another thing, Your Highness," Barov said. "If the City Hall is expanded according to the plan, the current building may not be able to accommodate so many people. Can... "

"You want to build a new City Hall?" The prince nodded in agreement. "For sure. I'll arrange Karl to see to it." In the eyes of the citizens, this was the face of the lord. While they rarely had the chance to enter the castle, they would often settle matters in the City Hall. Thus, a certain degree of splendor and style was necessary. If it was austere and unembellished, the people's confidence in him might erode.

After Barov took his leave, Roland called his guards to bring in Prius Dessau, the knight from the Elk Family.

Roland had not seen him for half a year. The knight was visibly fatter and his face fuller than usual, while his cheeks even glowed a bright red. Life had certainly been good.

"Recently, there's been more eggs and poultry in the Convenience Market. This's all your credit." Roland smiled. "Your way of raising chickens and ducks must be great."

"Hehe..." Prius laughed, somewhat embarrassed. "Without your support from the start, I couldn't have done any of this."

Farming was not a smooth journey. When Prius first started, the fowl plague even appeared and caused the death of many chickens. Roland simply thought of it as a good lesson and did not give up on him. Instead, the prince continued to buy baby chicks from the Stronghold and passed them to him for raising. Presently, he had become an indispensable talent of the town's community.

"I plan to recruit you in the City Hall under the agriculture department. Do you agree?"

"Your Highness, you... don't want me to continue raising chickens and ducks?" Prius was slightly surprised.

"Of course not. You've been doing a great job, and therefore, I hope that you can bring more people into this business." Roland said encouragingly, "Soon, I plan to expand the scale of farming by more than ten times. Then, you and your family won't be able to handle it alone. After you're recruited in the City Hall, you can pass on your experience to more people and teach them how to farm."

Given Lily's ability to eliminate bacteria and diseases, the most thorny problems of animal husbandry ceased to exist. Apart from chickens and ducks, large livestock such as cows and lambs were also within the prince's expansion plans.

"This is undoubtedly a noble job that's no less honorable than knighthood." The prince paused for a moment and then continued speaking. "There'll be a day when eggs and poultry will be served on the dining tables of every household in the Western Region. And when people see these delicious foods, they'll all remember your name. What do you think?"

"I'm... willing to serve you." Prius Dessau clenched his fists and bowed respectfully.

Chapter 403: Student and Teacher

...

Nana yawned loudly as she got off the bed.

She glanced at the whiteness outside the window. Still, she could see nothing but snow.

Reluctantly, she moved out of the warm bed and put on her thick winter coat. As she trudged out of the bedroom, she saw Aunt Alda tidying up the living room.

"Good morning," she muttered.

"Ah, little princess, you're awake." Alda smiled at her. "Want breakfast? It's ready."

"Yes." Nana sat beside the dining table and ran her eyes around the room, but she did not see her father. "Where's Daddy?"

"Lord Pine went out early in the morning," Alda replied from the kitchen. "He was carrying his silver shotgun."

"Indeed." Nana curled her lips upwards. "He's probably gone to the city wall to practice shooting again—ever since he fended off the demonic beasts with the flintlock, he has become enamored by this loud and booming weapon. Not only does he wipe a gun barrel every day, but also he'll go to the city wall to practice whenever he has time. Furthermore, he managed to apply for a specially-made flintlock from his Highness using my healing abilities as a bargaining chip.

It's all His Highness' fault for saying that long shotguns are the standard equipment for hunters," Nana thought. "If Mummy's still around, Daddy probably won't go out all day long like this."

"Breakfast's here." Alda placed two steaming plates on the table in front of Nana. "Fried eggs and white bread. Eat while they're hot."

"Thank you."

Breakfast's normally prepared before Daddy leaves home. Only Aunt Alda would specially place it in hot water to keep it warm. If instead, Daddy took care of me, I'd be eating cold and hard eggs.

Nana sighed uncontrollably.

If only Aunt Alda could marry Daddy.

But the young girl knew that this wish had little chance of happening. Alda was the family servant while Daddy was a noble of Border Town—as far as she understood, it was difficult for a commoner and a noble to get married.

She devoured the delicious breakfast, wiped her mouth, and shouted. "I'm going to the medical center."

"Okay." Alda put down the broom she was holding, and led Nana to the door. As she bent down and tied a scarf around Nana's neck, she said, "Be careful on the road, Miss Pine."

"Yes, Aunt!"

White snowflakes greeted Nana as she made her way out of the house.

This was her daily routine: In the morning, she would leave home for the medical center. She would treat the patients if there were any, or else, she would practice her abilities on animals. At noon, she would go to the castle to have lunch with Roland, while in the afternoon until night time, she would remain in the medical center, after which she would return home—she was the only witch who did not live in the castle.

Although time in the medical center was boring, she persisted because she wanted the patients to receive treatment as quickly as possible. The smile and warmth of the townspeople also supported and pushed her on.

"Lady Nana, good morning!"

"Miss Angel, going to the medical center again?"

"Today's weather ain't good. Do take care of your body."

"Miss Pine, have you eaten breakfast? Why not have a bowl of hot oatmeal that I just prepared?"

Greetings like these continued incessantly whenever she walked in public. It was a stark contrast to a year ago. Her sisters claimed that she was currently the most popular witch in Border Town, even more popular than Anna. Nana wasn't concerned about a popularity contest, albeit she was happy with the current atmosphere. Every person whom she had treated before would greet her affectionately, and this filled her with a sense of achievement.

"Elder sister Anna was right," Nana thought. "The only way to change people's prejudices was to face them adamantly."

When she arrived at the medical center, the First Army soldier who was manning the gate bowed and greeted her. "Hello, Miss Anna."

"Good morning, are there patients today?"

"Not at the moment," the soldier replied. "But your friends have come."

"Friends?" She was surprised. "Could it be Anna?" As she thought of Anna, she excitedly ran up to the second floor and pushed open the door, only to find Mystery Moon, Hummingbird, and Lily idly lying on the table. On noticing her, the three of them immediately got up and surrounded her.

"You three... "

"Haha, are you pleasantly surprised? We came all the way just to see you!" Mystery Moon raised her arms and exclaimed.

"Mystery Moon suggested that instead of lazing about in the castle, it would be a good idea to come out for a walk," Hummingbird added.

"You two may be free, but I'm certainly not. I still have many insect samples to observe." Lily, who was standing at the back, lamented. "Nana must be very busy as well. You think that she's like you?"

"Is that so? Yesterday, I peeked and saw you dozing off in front of the microscope. You were obviously sick of your job." Mystery Moon shrugged her shoulders.

"Nothing of that sort!"

Nana was slightly disappointed that it wasn't Anna who turned up, but she quickly buoyed up. At present, Anna was His Highness' busiest subordinate, and naturally, could not spend as much time with her as in the past.

"No, I'm in fact very free," she replied, laughing. "Thank you, you three."

"Ahem... since you say so, I shall remain behind to accompany you." Lily turned her head. "It won't be a problem to observe the samples tomorrow."

"What are we gonna play?" Hummingbird questioned.

"What else?" Mystery Moon took out a pack of playing cards. "Of course, this!"

"Aye, 'Fight the Landlord' may be interesting, but it's a three-player game."

"No, not 'Fight the Landlord'." She shook her head uncannily. "A new game that's suitable for four players, where we compete to see who can show her cards the fastest. I learned it from Andrea's group only yesterday!"

"The three-player group of the Sleeping Island?" Lily said, holding her forehead. "You learn poorly from others, yet still choose to learn from this bunch... had you used your energy to learn new knowledge from His Highness instead, you won't have made so little progress until now."

"This was also handed down by His Highness." Mystery Moon retorted. "Why's it not considered part of His Highness' new knowledge?"

"Other than you, there's probably no one in the Witch Union who thinks this way." Lily stared at her for a moment.

"I'd like to learn as well..." Hummingbird mumbled softly.

Nana watched the conversation going on, and laughed uncontrollably. She felt like she was back to the carefree days when she attended Teacher Karl's academy.

...

Under the company of the three witches, the morning time, which was usually boring, passed quickly. They then went to the castle for lunch together, after which Nana returned to the medical center alone.

As she stepped into the hall, she saw someone unexpected.

Karl Van Bate.

"Mr. Karl!" Nana said in surprise. "What brings you here?"

"To see you." Karl smiled and gazed at her, and then said happily, "You... have grown up."

"Is that so?" Nana lowered her head, as if embarrassed. "I'm still a long way from Anna."

"Everyone's different. You have your strong points." He laughed. "Watching you and Anna grow up, as well as observing the town's changes, it seems that I can no longer see the cracks."

"What cracks?" Nana was confused.

"Nothing... I'm just spouting nonsense." Karl shook his head. "I used to believe that the god had forsaken this world, but now, I feel that it continues to watch over us."

"Not a god," Nana corrected him. "His Highness says that these are the fruits of human efforts. Weren't those residential communities built by you?"

"But without an origin, nothing could have happened. At that time, when I thought that Anna was dead, and you somehow awakened as a witch, I was utterly flustered. It might have been a God who heard my prayers and answered my call." Karl said in a gentle voice. "It brought us His Highness Roland."

Chapter 404: The Journey to Magnetolectricity

"Ah... I envy Nana so much." Mystery Moon wiped her wet hair and drew her face close to Lily who was sitting upright at the desk.

"Hmm," Lily replied without even turning her head.

"You don't ask why I envy her?"

"You'll soon fill me in anyway," Lily said, twitching her mouth.

"Damn it!" Mystery Moon mumbled, but could not help saying in the end, "Didn't you see how the soldiers at the hospital and the townsmen nearby treat her?"

"Saw it."

" 'Hello, Miss Nana,' 'Are you leaving, Miss Angel?' 'Miss Pine, this is the wheat cake I made,' ... I want to be treated like that, too!" Mystery Moon pressed her face onto Lily's cheek, but was pushed away relentlessly.

"That's a return for her ability," Lily said without turning a hair. "Didn't you notice that ever since the Months of the Demons, she's been staying at the hospital almost every day, waiting to treat the wounded? Half of the locals have received her treatment, and the rest are pretty much their families."

"You're exaggerating."

"Not really," Lily said with a sigh and put down the book in her hand. "Although not everyone will fight against demonic beasts at the city wall, it's perfectly normal for townees to get injured—miners can hurt their toes by ores; kiln labors can get burned. The same applies to the apprentices at the steam engine plants and the chemistry laboratory." She paused for a moment and said, "His Highness once told me that Nana and I are the foundation of medical care in Border Town; one of us for internal medication and the other surgery. This allows the operation to remain at an intense level, while still make sure everyone is healthy without establishing a safety policy. However, in fact, I haven't done anything except epidemic prevention for new refugees."

"So you're feeling sour like me!" Mystery Moon said, leaning over unyieldingly.

"No, I'm not!" Lily fired. "And stay away from me. You're interfering with my reading."

"Aw..." Mystery Moon chickened and said, "but I'm really envious of her."

"Then learn from Nana. Take the initiative to help every townie until they know you and get familiar with you. Then surely everybody will say hello to you wherever you go," said Lily, shrugging her shoulders.

"But I don't have an ability like Nana's," Mystery Moon said, frustrated.

"Then use your physical strength if not your ability," said Lily, mocking. "Regardless, you've been there at the camps of the Witch Cooperation Association."

"You... rascal!"

Mystery Moon still nursed a grudge when she went to bed. She knew that Lily was right, but being inferior to the other witches chafed her pride. This was intolerable. She had gone through so much pain before finally finding an ideal place to settle down and idling about all day was torture.

Mystery Moon slept fitfully all night. She knocked on Roland's office door with dark circles below her eyes the following day.

"What's the matter?" the prince asked in surprise. "Were you bullied?"

"By Lily... No, nevermind." She leaned dramatically on Roland's desk and asked, "Your Highness, didn't you say that I have great potential? Why's there no change in my ability yet? It really can't evolve unless I understand Natural Science Theoretical Foundation?"

"I see," Roland said, trying in vain to suppress his laughter. "Actually, I've been thinking about this problem, too."

"What problem?"

"Didn't Agatha say that over 400 years ago, the witches at the Union experienced High Awakening even without a comprehensive understanding of the world? Apart from basic practices, the rest will be a sudden enlightenment—this could be achieved by the observation of natural phenomena, or by an accidental flash of inspiration." Roland continued, "However, the latter is apparently not comparable to the awakening inspired by systematic learning. Look at Agatha's magic power. She's not only the weakest one among the evolved witches, but she can't even compete with some of the ordinary witches such as Sylvie and Andrea."

"Doesn't matter, as long as it evolves!" Mystery Moon's eyes were sparkling. "You've got an idea?"

"It may not work," the prince said, throwing up his hands, "but it's worth a try. What do you know about magnetic forces?"

"Um... A force produced by the directional movement of electrons, which a magnetic field acts on the magnetic bodies and electric currents in it."

"That was copied from the book," he smiled and said. "You memorized it well, but you probably don't understand it at all."

Mystery Moon hesitated for a moment and nodded.

"You've seen lines of magnetic forces simulated by iron powder. You also know the direction of magnetic forces, and have seen the DC generator, too. So I think... you may not enable closed circuits to quickly cut lines of magnetic forces, yet you can change the magnetic field you form, thereby personally experiencing the transformation from magnetism to electricity. "

"I don't quite follow you."

"The nature of the transformation from magnetism to electricity is the change in magnetic flux. If you wanna change the magnetic flux in a constant magnetic field, the only way is to change the area, that is, to cut magnetic induction lines." The prince drew a diagram on the paper and said, "What if the area remains constant? That'll be changing the magnetic field, which means changing the magnetic flux."

Mystery Moon groped unsuccessfully for adequate words, failing because she didn't understand a word.

The prince laughed and said, "It's OK that you don't get it. You only need to do this—quickly release and withdraw your magnetic forces rather than continuously use your power."

"And then?" Mystery Moon waited for Roland to continue.

"Nothing more." He shook his head. "This is the only step."

"Huh? Just release and withdraw magnetic forces?"

"Correct. If you can also change the direction of lines of magnetic forces, that would be perfect. For example, switch from the left hand to the right hand." The prince smiled and said, "While you practice, I'll prepare a 'little toy' for you. You'll know why when you get the hang of this method."

...

Two days later, Mystery Moon received what His Highness called a "little toy". It was a square frame made of copper wires, the top of which was connected to a glass ball no bigger than half of a fist. Taking a closer look, she could see the copper wires were cut open in the ball, and were connected by a much finer metal wire.

An accompanying instruction manual read, "Hold the two ends of the square frame with both hands and practice. Note: be sure to draw the curtains and hide the Stone of Light."

What the heck is that?

She scratched her head and then did what the instruction manual instructed— "It's practice no matter how I do it. Just ignore it, and it'll be fine."

Mystery Moon learned that it was not hard to quickly release and withdraw her power, but changing the direction of magnetic forces delivered a blinding headache. Magnetic force was an essential power to her and at first, this endeavor was akin to breathing with only one nostril at a time. Although Mystery

Moon had restrained herself from playing poker games and been dutifully practicing her new skill for the last two days, the result lasted merely half a minute.

She took a deep breath and summoned the magic power in her body.

At first she felt nothing, but soon she saw a flash of red light.

The metal wire in the glass ball turned orangy red, and the light became increasingly bright and intense. In a few seconds, the light was glaring. Mystery Moon almost could not believe her eyes. The inkily dark room was lit by soft light much purer than the candle light, which she had never seen.

She was still in a daze when the red light faded away accompanied by a feeble popping sound before the darkness enveloped the room again.

Chapter 405: Accompany

The next morning, Mystery Moon ran to the office in a hurry with bigger dark circles under her eyes.

"Why would the glass ball light up? It didn't work afterwards, no matter how hard I tried to apply my power..." she could not wait to spit it all out after pushing open the door.

"That... fast?" The prince was a little surprised. He put down the quill, took the small object from Mystery Moon and said, "I thought it would take you two or three days."

Mystery Moon bent over, propped up her chin on the edge of the desk, and asked with a blink, "What on earth was glowing?"

"That was electric light." The prince smiled and said, "You released lightning from the sky."

"Lightning?" She could not help repeating the word in a quiet voice, and then shook her head. "But it didn't look like it at all. This light was a red-orange color, and kept glowing—lightning is always just a flash."

"The lightning lit the filament, making it glow continuously." The prince twisted the glass ball and took it off, then said, "It's fine that you don't understand it. I'll let you see the real electric light later."

Mystery Moon's eyes were wide open. She gazed at Roland's every single movement, afraid of missing something. The prince drew the two copper wires closer and put the glass ball back again. "There you go. Now continue to practice."

"That's it?" She took the wire frame, utterly disappointed.

"That's right," the prince covered his mouth and said, "and don't forget to draw the curtains when practicing."

...

Lily was sitting at the end of the bed reading Natural Science Theoretical Foundation when Mystery Moon returned to the bedroom.

"Why are you up so early today?" she asked in surprise. "Since you're up, bring me breakfast. An omelet and bread, please. No porridge."

"No, I won't bring breakfast for a traitor," Mystery Moon said with a grunt. She drew the curtains, and the room turned completely dark in an instant.

"Hey, what're you doing?" Lily frowned and asked.

"Practicing my ability." She threw herself on the floor and said, "Draw the curtains and hide the Stone of Light—that's His Highness' requirement."

"Fine, fine," the little girl rolled her eyes and said, "I'll do my reading in the hall."

"No, you can't!" Mystery Moon hollered.

"Why?" Lily darted her a look, "I can't read when I'm starving, and I have to stay with you here?"

"Um..." Mystery Moon paused a moment, "I'll bring you breakfast. Can you stay here?"

"What?" Lily asked with great interest, "Are you afraid of the dark?"

"Not at all!" She puffed out her cheeks and muttered after a while, "I just need company."

She wanted somebody to witness her progress and be amazed at her ability. Even if she failed, she hoped someone would still comfort her, but she would rather carry these words to her grave than confide in Lily.

"Okay then. I'll stay with you this time, since you sound so pathetic," Lily said with a yawn. "Breakfast, quick!"

Mystery Moon finally got ready to practice after reluctantly bringing the breakfast over.

Lily swallowed the egg in content and asked, "What're you going to do? Magnetize the stuff in your hand?"

"No, I'm going to let the magnetic forces in my hand change quickly. His Highness says that'll produce thunder and lightning."

Lily was stunned—"Thunder and lightning?"

"Yeah, I'm going to start..."

"Hold on," the little girl shouted, drawing closer to the door. "It's good now. Go ahead."

Mystery Moon exhaled a long breath and mobilized her magic power as she had earlier. If this happened at the camps of the Witch Cooperation Association, Supervisor Cara would definitely scold her for such behavior. However, His Highness had intentionally replaced all the wares in the bedroom that contained iron, including iron nails with copper-made items, making it easy for her to practice.

She was generously treated in Border Town and would not allow herself to sit idle.

Reminiscences of her experience in the town swarmed back upon her, image by image, as vivid as a merry-go-round. This time Mystery Moon found herself quickly in a ready state. The magic power danced between her hands with increased movement and growing intensity.

Then she saw the electric light. Like a blue ghost revealing itself from layers of clouds, the light was transient, and disappeared instantly. Nevertheless, she clearly saw a trace of electric light. It was like a tiny arc, spanning from one end of the copper wire to the other, bursting out gentle popping sounds.

It was far from the end.

Then came a second arc, and then a third... She noticed in dismay that every time the magnetic forces transformed, there was dazzling electric light springing up, the traces of which also changed correspondingly with its movements. With the direction of magnetic forces quickly switching back and forth, a bridge of blue and white gradually took shape between the two copper wires.

"What's that?" Lily who stood far away asked, her eyes wide open.

The electric light was insignificant compared with the red-orange blaze of yesterday, but it made Mystery Moon quiver in excitement—this was her first time witnessing her own ability! In comparison to the invisible lines of magnetic forces she could not understand in the slightest, the rhythm at which the electric arc danced and the direction of its movement were completely under her control. This was truly "lightning" created by her.

Electricity generates magnetism, and vice versa. That's what it is. She sensed the power in her body had become more visible and clear.

Mystery Moon got up on her feet and put the metal frame on the desk. She slowly released her hands to let the magic power die down, but the ends of the copper wires were still glittering, like flickering stars in the darkness from a far distance.

She now had a better understanding of these words.

In other words, electricity is magnetism, and vice versa.

Roland kneaded his sore neck with a quill between his teeth.

"Do you need a hand?" Nightingale's voice popped up by his ears.

"Ah, thank you," he nodded slightly and said. Nightingale thus laid her two fair hands on Roland's shoulders and started to massage his neck with just the right amount of strength.

Roland half closed his eyes, enjoying this moment of serenity. In order to draft the first code of the town, which would later serve as the Basic Laws of all the primary laws, he had been up earlier than even the guards for the past three days. It wasn't until today that he finally finished the draft. As Roland had no knowledge of the laws, he could only jot down some ten articles in plain language based on his understanding of the system, which was no longer than two pages altogether.

Nonetheless, these articles contained ideas and ideology from the new world. He believed this code would enable him to carry out a brand new system which was entirely different from the ancient feudal

system across the whole continent while expanding his territory. With this code as its base, his new kingdom would indubitably distinguish itself from the others.

"Your Highness!" The office door was suddenly flung open. Mystery Moon rushed in with the copper wire frame in her hand, shouting, "I finally got it!"

Roland opened his eyes, and saw the girl withdraw her hands and put the "little toy" on the desk.

"Look!" She did not touch the wire frame, but there was still an arc of light where the copper wires were cut open.

Looking at this incredible scene, Roland could not help dropping his jaw. The quill slid off the corner of his mouth and fell on the floor.

Chapter 406: The Limitation of Magic Power

"What did I just see? A self-generating system of electricity that doesn't need an external energy supply!

Mystery Moon's ability is an attaching type of magic so the answer is the answer is clear. She's added a brand new property to the metal frame, and" her magic power acts as the energy supply," Roland mused to himself.

"How did you manage to do that?" Roland asked aloud.

"When you said that there's an intertwining relationship between electricity and magnetism, and that they're indivisible, I wondered if I could make the objects generate lightning by magnetizing them. I tried to add a constantly changing magnetic forces to the copper wires because you've said creating electricity requires changes in magnetic forces. Then it turned out this way," Mystery Moon answered cautiously, her eyes sparkling with expectation.

"That's why... Changes in electric currents do produce magnetic fields, but magnetic fields only generate electricity under certain circumstances. It requires both closed circuits and changes in magnetic flux; changes in the magnetic area and magnetic forces both need external energy supply.

Mystery Moon's new ability has replaced an energy supply with the self-changing magnetic force," the prince concluded. Roland would have thought it was a perpetual motion machine prototype, if he saw it in modern times. Yet here in this world, he understood that powers of witches could not be judged by common sense of his time. The magnetic property added to the objects might not be produced by magnetic poles, just as the Blackfire was not natural fire.

They were tangible forms of the magic power.

He could only wonder whether Mystery Moon had noticed any magnetic force change in objects to which she attached her magic power.

When Roland asked her about it, she nodded and then shook her head. "When I was in the Witch Cooperation Association, I once wanted to change the magnetism of objects according to my will. To avoid causing my sisters any trouble, I tried to make the objects less magnetic when they were not in

use. However, it didn't work. Their magnetic force remained the same. I thought it was impossible, so I gave up on it," she said.

"Just as I expected," Roland thought. He cocked his head towards Nightingale and said, "The form of her magic power... "

"They have been united." Nightingale stepped out of her mist and smiled. "The two are now one."

Mystery Moon gasped, "Did I really... "

"Yes, you did. Your ability has evolved." Roland confirmed. "Only a long-term and relentless dedication of practice can lead to enlightenment and evolution that fast. You did a great job. From now on, you'll be the sixth evolved witch in the Witch Union."

"Congratulations." Nightingale went to Mystery Moon and patted her head, smiling.

"Now, am I able to do more for Your Highness?" she asked, her eyes shining with excitement.

"Yes, countless things," Roland smiled and said. "As I've told you before, you've got great potential. But first, go rest. You have dark circles as huge as fists around your eyes. I'll test your ability in the afternoon."

"Yes!" she nodded vigorously.

After Mystery Moon left the office, Nightingale purposefully shut the door and turned her attention to Roland. Ignoring her regular perche at either Roland's desk or the French window, she drew close to him. Grasping his shoulders and leaning in to speak, she stood so close that strands of her fair hair tickled his face. He felt his heart beating violently at the sight of her bright eyes and soft, red lips.

Eh? What's going on? Is she asking for it in broad daylight?"

"Tell me the method." These were not the words that the prince had expected to hear from Nightingale, "Wait... what's this have to do with anything?"

"What method?" he asked.

"The method to evolve without reading Natural Science Theoretical Foundation?" she said excitedly, "I can tell from Mystery Moon's grades that she doesn't understand the contents of the book, but you taught her how to evolve and gain a new ability! What should I do? Practice with 'little toys' as well?"

"Eh, she is asking for the evolvment method. What a pity... no, a relief." Roland thought and cleared his throat, putting himself together. "I'm afraid your ability won't evolve through a sudden flash of enlightenment," he said.

"Why not?"

"According to Agatha, only observing natural phenomena related to your ability can provoke an evolvment. Your Mist is just too incredible for me to understand, let alone guide you to learn about it." Roland explained. "Maybe the only method for you to develop your magic power is a sound understanding of natural science, physics and even advanced mathematics."

Nightingale's face fell. She feebly walked to the couch and sank back into it, feeling as if her body was hollowed out.

After lunch, Roland spent the whole afternoon conducting a comprehensive test on Mystery Moon's new ability.

He named it "Variable Magnetic Force." It could be applied to any object like her magnetizing ability, and it would create periodic variation based on the magic power she initially conjured. However, as far as insulators, no electricity would be generated.

Roland determined that Mystery Moon's magic power was the weakest of the the evolved witches. She could only light up two Magic Stones embedded in the Sigil of God's Will, half a stone less than even Maggie. Unfortunately, the attaching-type magic ability required a vast amount of magic power. The greater and longer variations in magnetic forces, the greater demand for magic power. After a series of tests, Roland found that Mystery Moon's new ability could serve as a stable battery, but it was far from sufficient to drive a large electric motor or power a steam engine. He tested her ability by transforming an old DC motor, initially used for the electrolysis of water, into an electric motor, and the result was disappointing. The motor, which consumed all of Mystery Moon's magic power to add a magnetic force, could only work half day. That meant her new ability could not practically be used as a source power.

Roland didn't tell Mystery Moon the bad results. Instead, he encouraged her to keep studying and practicing her new ability, because she was fragile and he feared bad news would be devastating.

Besides, he knew that ability evolvment was not a sudden transformation, but a metamorphosis through learning.

Roland remembered something he had heard from Agatha, the method to jointly produce Stone of Light. He thought, "If there is a witch who can control or transfer magic power, Mystery Moon's power limitation won't be a problem anymore."

In the evening, he went to talk to Tilly Wimbledon.

"An assistant witch with a controlling type of magic?" she said after hearing the prince's idea. She thought for a while and answered, "No witch of the Sleeping Island has that kind of ability."

"Really?" he asked, heaving a sigh. "It seems that Mystery Moon has to depend on herself to improve."

Yet what Tilly said next cheered him. "However, I know where you can find the witch you want."

Chapter 407: Tilly's Questioning

"You mean... she didn't follow you to Sleeping Island?" The prince soon got what Tilly meant.

"Exactly." Princess Tilly shook her head helplessly. "Her name is Spear Passi and her ability is magic power channeling. She can channel magic powers of several witches. In other words, a witch at one end of the channel can borrow magic powers from other witches connected, so you may need her help."

Tilly paused for a while and continued. "She lives right in Fallen Dragon Ridge."

"Since you know so much about her, you must have contacted her," Roland asked for further explanation, "and what're the reasons for her to stay there? There's a risk that she'll be caught by the church."

After a moment of silence, Tilly answered, "That's because she's a Marquess and Lord of Fallen Dragon Ridge."

"Lord?" He was startled, "A witch?"

"Yes, her father Marquis Passi, the last Lord, gave the title and the territory to her, instead of to his second and third son. Due to her high rank, Spear can conceal her witch identity pretty well, and thus can lead a far better life than ordinary witches," Tilly said slowly, "and she contacted me first and offered her help during the migrations. Because of her, I was able to quickly gather the witches from the towns in the southern and middle parts of the Kingdom."

"She contacted me first'...", Roland sensed something strange thereinto and asked, "Wait... She didn't intend to give a shelter to her fellow witches?"

"No." Tilly shook her head. "Not only that, she also wanted those witches to leave her territory as soon as possible and protect themselves from being tortured by the church. Spear apparently values her lord title more."

Her Lord title would no doubt be in danger if the church found she was protecting witches. Unlike towns in the remote border area, Fallen Dragon Ridge had well-established churches and priests, and their believers greatly outnumbered those in the Western Region. Roland understood her choice but was still astonished. "If a witch in her territory is seized, will she... "

"I asked her the same question, " Tilly said with some sadness, "and Spear Passi bluntly told me if a witch was caught by the people, she would try to replace her in the jail with a death-row prisoner and secretly send her out of her territory; but if a witch was caught by the Verdict Army or judged by the church, she would just stand by."

"..." Roland thought, "It turned out that Spear Passi voluntarily got in touch with Tilly because of the hidden danger of witches in Fallen Dragon Ridge. That was why Tilly chose to leave for the Fjords, which was a new place for her despite the risk of crossing the channel, instead of settling down in Fallen Dragon Ridge." At this thought, he frowned and asked Tilly, "If I invite her to Border Town, will she come?"

"I won't bank on that, but you may have a try," Tilly threw up her hands and said, "I'm just telling you where you can find her but I'm not promising anything."

Roland made a long sigh and said, "I'll send a messenger to talk to her first."

Without doubt, he would choose Nightingale as the messenger, given that she was able to avoid eyes and ears of the people when she got into the castle, and that she could also discern lies. As long as she made Spear believe she held no hostility, Spear would probably not overreact, either.

It generally took five or six days to travel from Border Town to Fallen Dragon Ridge by boat, but that trip would only cost Maggie half a day. They could bring Lightning, who acted faster as a helper. The three

witches formed a team of the highest mobility in the Witch Union, and now equipped with guns, they could both attack enemies and defend themselves.

Thinking about the plan for quite a while, Roland made up his mind.

Assuming that the Marquise did not agree to come, it was still a matter of time for him to investigate the situation of her territory. As an important passage on the way to the Southernmost Region, Fallen Dragon Ridge was included in his spring attack plan.

"I heard there's a newly evolved witch in the castle?" Tilly suddenly switched the topic.

"Ah, you mean Mystery Moon. Yes, she did cohere her magic power," Roland nodded and told Tilly about her evolvment process. "But using the ancient witches' method to evolve is not very effective in increasing her magic power. To become someone like Anna, it still requires the thorough understanding of solid knowledge."

"But the ancient way is still a method," Tilly said with interest, "and there's a point I find very interesting in what you said just now. What did you mean by 'They're not natural phenomena but only concrete forms of magic powers'?"

"That was my personal speculation." He picked up his cup and had some tea. "Neither Anna's Heart Fire nor her Blackfire is something you can find in nature, so it's not hard to view them as concrete forms of magic powers, but what about the normal fires before the evolvment? So I assume the normal fires were also created by magic powers, and that it reflected what Anna perceived as 'heat'. As her perception became more thorough and profound, the images of 'heat' also changed. This explains exactly what Agatha has experienced. Many witches have similar abilities before their evolvment because they've observed the same natural phenomenon. After High Awakening, their abilities vary because their understandings of the phenomenon have huge differences."

"Sounds quite reasonable," Tilly replied without saying yes or no, "but according to your speculation, the witches of the same kind will evolve almost the same new abilities if they've same understandings of the phenomenon, right?"

"Yes, pretty much like that, but under the condition that they've got exactly the same understanding abilities."

Roland did not tell her another idea of his, which was to what extent magic powers could evolve. "Since magic power forms the foundation of all kinds of abilities, it is elementary and universal. Provided that there is a witch who understands everything in the nature, will she be able to display all kinds of abilities?"

"Are you... coming from a world without magic power?" Tilly suddenly questioned.

"Poof..." The tea nearly gushed out of the prince's mouth. He wiped his mouth and asked, "What, what did you say?"

"I've gone through all the books written by you during this month and always felt something was wrong." Princess Tilly looked at him in the eye. "I finally see what the problem is after hearing what you said just now. You separate magic power from the nature... Neither Natural Science Theoretical Foundation nor Elementary Physics mentions anything about magic power and you said concrete

expressions of magic power were not something existing in the nature, but... magic power itself is a part of the nature."

Roland was stunned.

He suddenly realized that he completely forgot Tilly lived in a world where magic power naturally existed. So did the previous Prince Roland, but he just placed magic power in a position opposite to natural phenomena and seemed to get used to it.

Blame the excess memories coming all of a sudden for this careless mistake? It probably won't work this time. It is acceptable to say that Prince Roland wrote these books based entirely on his memories, but how to explain that he firmly believes in them and subconsciously separate magic power from the nature? Is it possible for him to pledge that this is still the memory of the previous Prince Roland's?

Roland swallowed hard.

Chapter 408: The Conundrum

He couldn't believe that she was digging holes for him using the books that he wrote himself.

When faced with such complicated information, most people struggled to even understand it, let alone to notice its flaws—it was pretty unbelievable that there was no mention of magic power at all in a science book studying the nature of everything in the world.

Roland had also completely wiped the Fourth Prince's memories from his mind, and besides trying to mimic the Prince during his first month after traversing the space and time, he never considered it ever again. His ministers were afraid to question him, and he didn't have to hide who he was from the witches, so he became more and more careless.

However, Tilly was no ordinary witch.

Besides being Prince Roland's sister, she was also an Extraordinary.

Not only was she able to quickly finish all of his books, but she also shrewdly noticed this inconsistency. Her logic was just as clear as that of any modern person who had undergone universal education. In addition, she used leading questions to prove her point so that he had no chance of arguing his way out.

This was a disaster.

Roland's brain was spinning with frantic thoughts, but he had no idea how to respond to her. Any forced explanation to someone who could notice this inconsistency would only arouse more suspicion, and lying to cover a lie would only create even more issues.

Tilly broke the awkward silence and said gently, "You don't have to answer me right now. It's late, and I'm going back to the Witch House. You should get some rest too, Your Highness."

"Um... Okay." Roland stared into the eyes of this grey-haired woman, trying to understand her thoughts, and forgot to send her off.

Tilly stopped at his office door, turned around and asked, "I can trust you, right?"

Usually, Roland would have confidently agreed, but in that moment, he found himself struggling to respond and could only manage a slow nod.

After the door closed, Nightingale said, confused, "How could she just leave like that?"

"Why do you look so upset?" Roland scoffed at her.

"I was so close to hearing about your true life story!" Nightingale stuck out her tongue. "Why didn't she press on you harder?"

"Because she didn't want to risk our friendship." The Prince heavily sighed.

"What?"

"No... nothing." Roland leaned back in his chair and felt a chill on his back. Tilly's behavior was absolutely perfect because she didn't push him too far. Border Town was definitely the biggest ally to the Sleeping Island, and allies were more important than identities in the face of their enemies. If she strained their relationship by asking too much, it would only mean bad news for the witches of the Sleeping Island.

That was why Tilly left him some time to recover after posing her question. However, this didn't mean that she didn't need an answer, and if he kept dragging his feet, he could also lose her trust right after they defeated their enemies together. She had made her move, and it was time for him to respond.

However, Roland couldn't tell Tilly the truth, at least not at the moment—Anna and Nightingale were different because they knew only him from the very beginning, but Tilly was Prince Roland's little sister. Until he figured out what her real thoughts on her brother were, he would have to keep this secret to himself.

He shook his head and dismissed these annoying thoughts. Roland turned to Nightingale and said, "You heard our conversation earlier, too. What do you think about checking out the situation with Maggie and Lightning?"

"No problem, Your Highness."

"It's not just going to be a simple chat... To be honest, I'm a little worried about you," he slowly said.

"Wha... what's there to be worried about?" Nightingale stuttered. "I... I'm fine, even if I have to drag her back... "

"That's exactly what I'm worried about!" Roland slammed on the table. "What do you mean drag her back? Are you trying to have her tear us to shreds? Listen, you have to be careful this time and check out the situation before you confront Spear Passi. It's alright if she refuses; just don't threaten her—as a fellow witch, she'll be no stranger to you."

"Uh... is that all?" she asked disappointedly.

"That's all in regards to witches." Roland frowned. "Additionally, you need to help Lightning record the layout of Fallen Dragon Ridge's surroundings, fortifications, sentries, and armies, and then return as quickly as possible."

Nightingale murmured in acknowledgment.

"And finally," Roland said, pausing, "be safe. This's the most important thing."

"Can we get another pint of ale over here?"

"Hey, is my oatmeal ready?"

"Coming, coming! Sorry for the wait!"

Otto Luoxi entered the pub, Covert Trumpeter, and was instantly surrounded by chaotic chatter. A crackling fire warmed him, and a smell of sour and musty body odor made him cringe. As a nobility, Otto rarely set foot into commoners' areas and was not used to being in close quarters with them. If not for his appointment with the Rats, he wouldn't be caught dead in this backalley pub in the outer city.

Following local rules, he quickly found his target—a skinny man wearing a hood sitting in an unlit corner of the pub, enveloped in the shadows. A small piece of bone lay next to his hand.

Otto sat across the man and said, "Cheers to Skeleton Fingers."

"You don't have liquor to give cheers."

"But I have the thing measuring all things on earth." He spoke the code word.

The man shrugged. "Call me Hood. I heard you're here to get some information?"

Otto nodded. While Timothy was stalling on giving him a response, he hadn't been able to rest and was busy asking around about the rebel king—someone who could hold the Western Territory for half a year after the king's ascension and completely stump Timothy was surely with a force to be reckoned with.

The fastest way to gain as much information as possible was through the Rats.

This was the sixth Rat Otto had spoken to, and the information he had gained startled him. The legendary rebel king, Roland Wimbledon, fourth son of King Wimbledon III, was not showing any signs of weakening and was even challenging the new king with the threat of an attack to dethrone Timothy.

This man was also true to his word—although Timothy went to great lengths to hide the news, Otto was still able to find out about the strange collapse in King's City. If this news was true, an alliance with Timothy was questionable at best. He needed to get to the bottom of all this to protect the Kingdom of Dawn.

"That's right," Otto Luoxi whispered. "I want to know about the giant crash and collapse in the King's City palace three months ago."

Chapter 409: A Reliable Ally

"You've come to the right man," Hood smiled and said in a raspy voice that made it hard to tell his age. "Even though I live in the outer city, I happened to be near the palace on the day of the incident, and as soon as I heard the crash, I ran to the palace gate. You have no idea how terrifying the crash was, because it sounded like lightning hitting the earth. All the surrounding windows, whether paper or glass,

were shattered by an invisible force, and some people were even scared to death by the sudden sound...
"

Every Rat claimed to be nearby and to have witnessed everything, but each person's story was different from the other. "Okay, no need to ramble on about unimportant things. How did it happen?" Otto Luoxi interrupted and asked. "Was this incident really related to the Fourth Prince... Roland Wimbledon?"

Hood cleared his throat and stretched out his right hand. "I can answer that, but... "

"You need the thing measuring all things on earth, right?" Otto opened his wallet. "How much?"

The so-called "thing measuring all things on earth" was nothing more than a gold royal. Only uncultured people like Rats would use such an obvious code word or phrase to appear mysterious.

The Rat stuck up two fingers.

Otto took out two gold royals and placed them in Hood's hand. "This is not a small fee, so I hope your information lives up to it."

"Of course. The reputation of Skeleton Fingers rests upon this." The Rat smiled greedily and pocketed the gold royals.

"A Rat's reputation is as ridiculous as a ruler's mercy." Otto sniffed. "Go ahead."

"I'll start by answering your first question." After his payment, Hood's posture was much more relaxed. He sipped his ale, leaned back in his chair, and pointed towards the ceiling. "Thunder comes from the sky."

"What do you mean?" Otto frowned.

"Didn't you want to know what caused the crash?" the Rat whispered. "All thunder comes from the sky, and this was no exception. I saw it with my own eyes. Before the crash, a white rock floated into the palace, and then the incident happened."

"Nonsense! You mean to tell me that a huge rock fell from the sky and smashed the palace into pieces?"

"Hehe, everything I said is true, or else Skeleton Fingers wouldn't assign me this task. If you think I'm lying, you can leave right now." Hood shrugged. "But you won't get your fee back."

"... Keep going." Otto tried to repress his annoyance.

"The rock entered the palace only seconds after it appeared, but I could clearly tell that it wasn't that big or fast and didn't look like something that could destroy the Hall of Sky Dome, which is why I said it 'floated'. Also, when the crash and smoke appeared, I saw a menacing flash of fire that definitely wasn't caused by the collision," Hood said, smacking his lips. "I mean, His Highness Timothy's search afterwards proved this very point—he closed off and cleared the Inner City multiple times without arresting any suspects, and the palace is heavily guarded, so where else could the attack be from if not the sky?"

He took another sip of ale. "As for the fire and smoke, they resemble the phenomenon caused when an alchemy solution called snow powder burns, which is why I'm certain that this was an attack. By the way, I also have some information about snow powder, but you'd have to pay only a little more... "

"No need, I don't want to know." Otto interrupted. He had already heard through other channels about snow powder, which was originally used in celebrations but could be modified into a weapon. Rats probably didn't know anything about its specific content, so he didn't feel like wasting his money.

"Alright, now I'll answer your second question," Hood said, splaying his hands indifferently. "This incident was certainly related to Prince Roland."

"Why?"

"When did you arrive in King's City? Of course, I'm not trying to ask about your background or... identity, since that's a rule of Black Street, so you don't have to answer me." The Rat smiled. "What I mean is, if you arrived in King's City in early autumn, you'd know this: His Highness sent thousands of soldiers to attack Western Region, but only very few returned, all bearing letters from Prince Roland to His Highness."

All six Rats had mentioned this, which meant that it was probably true, but he continued to ask, "Are you talking about the warning of revenge? It sounds quite scary. Are you sure it's not pure folklore?"

"Most letters were brought by the soldiers into the palace, and the few that were leaked were mostly seized by the City Hall, but Skeleton Fingers always surprises its clients. I actually have a preserved 'warning' with me." Hood stuck up five fingers. "Considering it's a very rare letter from Prince Roland himself, the price is slightly higher. What do you think?"

...

Otto Luoxi returned to the palace, and Belinda immediately stood up to greet him. "Any news?"

"Not much, but I did get my hands on a letter from Prince Roland." He handed the wrinkly piece of paper to her, took off his coat, sat next to the fireplace, and told her all about what he had learned. "All six Rats gave similar answers to the second question, and this paper proves them right—Roland Wimbledon is not as weak as the King says he is, but the complete opposite. If the Kingdom of Dawn allies with Timothy, we may benefit very little and gain a tricky enemy."

"But all the Rats' answers to the first question were different," Belinda said with a frown.

"This proves that the attack was very mysterious and difficult to understand, and I kind of believe what the last Rat said." Otto sipped his hot tea and sighed. Spending too much time in the cheap pub made him very uncomfortable.

"From the sky?" Belinda gaped at him. "Are you crazy?"

"Of course not. If I hadn't seen this letter, I wouldn't dream of it either. Roland was very confident about the time and location of the attack, and only an attack from the sky would be able to pass the high city wall and strong fortifications, confusing even the shrewdest Rats." He frowned. "However, what's more important is what we do next."

"With the imminent threat from the Church, they should stop fighting each other and join forces against their common enemy."

"That's not for us to decide." Otto shook his head. "The only thing we can do is to find a reliable ally for the Kingdom of Dawn. His Highness Timothy Wimbledon seems a little... unreliable."

"Are you really going to go to Western Region?" Belinda was shocked. "Isn't that a place currently facing the dangers of the Months of the Demons?"

"It's nothing compared to the danger of our kingdom collapsing," he said after some silence. "You can stay here and wait for the new king's response, while I travel alone to Western Region."

Chapter 410: Expectations

The water vapor formed an even layer of white mist resembling thin gauze on the window pane. Chilly wind blew on the windows with a popping sound, which contrasted with the tranquil fireplace burning in the room.

Scroll sat in front of a long desk in the City Hall Office, reading rolls of thick documents.

Those documents were not about education but were statistics reported by various departments. She used her free time to memorize such information in case someone needed it. This was recently the main part of her work since there was not much to deal with in the Ministry of Education. After all, the second round of assessment ended not long ago, and another round wouldn't be carried out before next summer.

Having worked for His Highness Roland for half a year, she found out His Highness was particularly interested in statistics—he liked it when his subordinates described things with a long series of precise numbers; he frequently used terms such as horizontal ratio, year-on-year ratio, and chain relative ratio. Subsequently, all the staff in the City Hall had picked up this habit from him.

As the township population grew, the related statistical work increased correspondingly. Therefore, His Highness entrusted this work to Scroll and jokingly called her the "database" of Border Town. Although the nickname made her sound like a warehouse, His Highness described it as something extremely important. With the help of a database, he said he could estimate the development of next year and make economic and military plans. He even said all his future decisions concerning the territory would be based on the data analysis.

"Lady Scroll." A woman dressed as an apprentice pushed open the office door and entered the room. After bowing to Scroll, she handed her an application form. "Hello, my name is Freya. His Excellency Carter from the Department of Justice wishes to acquire the information on refugees who passed the resident verification within the last week."

Due to her limited ability to derivative skills, His Highness ordered that anyone who wanted to inquire complex data must get consent from Barov first. As for individual data, one could ask Scroll at any time.

"Wait a minute!" Scroll glanced at the signature on the application form, summoned the Book of Magic, and showed the corresponding contents on its pages. "Alright. Give this to Mr. Carter."

"Thank... thank you." Freya carefully held the book that came out of thin air as if it was a demonic beast.

"Don't worry. It won't hurt you." Scroll could not help but laugh. Most people had such an expression when they saw the Book of Magic. "You do not need to return the book to me because it will vanish four

hours later. However, according to the Constitution of Confidentiality, you aren't allowed to give it to anybody other than Carter."

"Yes ...My Lady."

Freya bowed and retreated. While she pushed open the door, Scroll saw a sea of people in the hall, and a chattering sound instantly rushed into her room, quieting down again when the door was closed.

This was a weekend, which was supposed to be a rest day, but the City Hall was still as busy as on workdays. Everybody was excited about the upcoming construction of Border Town, so they worked particularly hard. With the salary reward for overtime offered by His Highness, no one was willing to stay at home.

Scroll didn't understand His Highness's decisions. To her, there wasn't that much work to be done in the City Hall, and compared to the labors of miners and furnace workers, writing official documents, collecting data and making reports took much less effort - yet these were the main jobs of the City Hall. His Highness only had to give orders, and everyone would easily comply. There was really no need to raise the salary in this regard. Compared to most of the nobilities, His Highness appeared to be too benevolent.

Truthfully, Scroll didn't think His Highness Roland seemed like a real Lord. Yet, it was exactly such a person who led everybody to this stage, which was nearly a miracle.

She didn't come to this conclusion due to her respect and trust for Roland, but due to clear data; compared with one year ago, when only miners had a stable income in Border Town; the wages of miners, furnace workers and handymen had doubled now, although they used to earn the least; some emerging occupations such as assemblers in the steam plant and operators in the acid plant had had their wages raised eightfold, and the number of workers was still on the rise.

The changes within the town itself were so obvious that if a person hadn't lived here one year ago, he might find it very hard to believe that such changes were possible.

Scroll touched the words on the document. She couldn't imagine how the territory would continue to transform under His Highness' leadership, but she firmly believed it would have a future full of hope and surprises.

"Miss Scroll." The wooden door was pushed open, and His Highness Roland's guard stepped in. "His Highness wants to see you."

...

When she returned to the third floor of the castle, Scroll saw that His Highness was organizing pieces of the manuscript.

"Would you like me to record these things?" Tying her black hair up, which was messed up by the cold wind, she stepped up and asked the prince.

"That's right. It took at least half of my brain cells to finish this book." The prince massaged his neck, murmuring words that were difficult for Scroll to comprehend. "Even for the knowledge that was

commonly used at the time, I could only remember them generally, and I even had to deduce several formulas myself."

Scroll had gotten used to this behavior. She ignored his weird terms, picked up the manuscript, realizing the letters on its cover were in an unprecedented orange color that formed the word "calculus".

She flipped through a couple pages, and found it impossible to understand what the book title meant. She then focused on memorizing its contents—compared to the equations she had learned previously, she found these new formulas didn't even have numbers, but a series of bizarre symbols, like a whole set of new characters. They looked like things only Anna and Tilly would be interested in.

"Right," Roland asked, "what's the average income of the residents here?"

"The minimum was 10 silver royals per month, and the maximum was 40," Scroll answered without stopping her memorizing of calculus, "but to calculate the average income I would need the Book of Magic, which has been used once today."

"That's alright. You can give me the statistical result the day after tomorrow." Roland waved his hand. "I need this number to determine the fee for water and heating supply. The collective heating supply project is about to begin in a week. On its completion, this place would be as warm as spring, even through the longest winter."

A city without fear for the cold. This is one of the miracles that could only happen in His Highness's territory. "If I don't get extra work, I'll give you the result tomorrow."

"Tomorrow ...It would be nice if you could turn the Book of Magic into a storybook." Roland shook his head with a smile. "Or any book that Anna hasn't read."

"Storybook?" Scroll was slightly startled before quickly understanding his reasoning. "Tomorrow is Miss Anna's ..."

"Day of Awakening," the Prince nodded and said.